

Havering Advice for School Closures due to Adverse Weather Conditions



Introduction

Many schools face difficulties as a result of adverse weather particularly during periods of very low temperatures and heavy snow. The Local Authority (LA) acknowledges the difficult judgement that sometimes has to be made as to whether to temporarily close the school for safety reasons. We appreciate the efforts made by governors, Head Teachers and their staff to keep schools open wherever possible. Evidence shows that Head Teachers try to instill a culture in their pupils and the wider community that attending school is essential to children's life chances and start from a position of seeking to keep the school open if possible. As an LA we strongly endorse that approach.

In some circumstances closure is unavoidable, for example where there would not be enough staff on school sites to ensure pupil safety. It is right that the judgement on whether a school should close is made locally by those who are closest to the situation. School closure has widespread consequences and is never taken lightly. The community has to have confidence in Head Teachers to make the right decision for their school, to communicate the position promptly and regularly to parents and to do everything possible to re-open as soon as possible.

The LA supports the importance of taking a proportionate approach, balancing any risks arising from less supervision and minor slips and bumps against disruption to pupils' learning.

The LA wishes to ensure that there is a standardised approach for ensuring parents are made aware of school closures.

OpenCheck

Through discussions with schools it is apparent that the majority of schools in Havering use OpenCheck which is a system run by LGFL and is free to all schools (inc. Academies).

The Council is therefore encouraging all schools to register and use OpenCheck as the primary way to advise parents of school closures. Key benefits of OpenCheck are:

- Parents can easily check on the status of their children's school(s) on any given day.
- Parents using the 'Parent Comms app' can be kept informed by receiving data notifications when a school changes its status or has to close unexpectedly.
- Parents can "subscribe" to a schools information feed and receive alerts automatically.
- Parents can call 02084087508 quoting the schools DfE Number; parents will hear a message relating to the status of the school.
- Schools can embed an RSS feed onto their website to show the current status of the school which reduces the need for schools to edit their website.
- Head Teachers and designated staff can update the status of the school via the website, mobile app or via a text message to LGFL.
- The LA can add a link to OpenCheck for parents to view on its dedicated adverse weather webpage.

If your school is not already registered with OpenCheck you can create a free account here <https://opencheck.atomwide.com/reqAccount.aspx>. You will need to have two accounts per school, one for the Head Teacher and one for the person who will be designated principle user of the system.

Once the school is registered a full and comprehensive user guide can be accessed here: <https://opencheck.atomwide.com/Help/Help.html?default.html>

TimeFM

TimeFM are offering schools across Havering the opportunity to call the station each day the school is closed. The station will then mention the school during their on air bulletins and also add the school to the list they put on social media.

There are three ways to get in touch with TimeFM:

Call: 01708 741075 or 01708 767591

Email: onair@time1075.net

The password for 2018/19 is: Rudolph

Pupil Absence

Where children are unable to get to school due to severe weather conditions, you can mark them in the register using absence code 'Y'. This means that their absence won't affect your school's attendance figures.

However, if you believe that a child could have travelled safely to school, their absence should be recorded as unauthorised using code 'O'.

Staff absence

If some of your teachers can't get to work, you should be flexible by, for example:

- bringing together groups and classes with teachers and support staff working together
- using other school staff or volunteers to provide cover supervision or oversee alternative activities
- re-arranging the curriculum

Reception and other infant classes (children aged 5, 6 or 7) should normally be groups of 30 or fewer, but having more than 30 in one class due to temporary exceptional circumstances is not a reason to close the school or the class.

Exam disruption

You should prepare for possible disruption to exams as part of your emergency planning and make sure your staff are aware of these plans. If you have to close your school, or if a child misses an exam due to an emergency, you should discuss alternative arrangements with your awarding bodies.

You are responsible for making sure parents and children know what has been agreed, for example:

- using alternative venues
- an exam result being generated by the awarding body, based on factors such as a child's performance on other assessments in the same subject
- the opportunity for children to sit any missed exam later in the year

Things to consider before deciding to close

1. Can parents, pupils and staff access the school building safely?
2. Are pedestrian routes into school safe and accessible- has grit been applied?
3. Can pupils and staff be evacuated in an emergency?
4. Lack of parking facilities is already an issue for most schools and as such, is parking and safe passage at all possible within the vicinity of the school grounds.
5. In an emergency, could the Emergency Services access the school?
6. Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff will be travelling, been considered?
7. Are there any areas within the school locality particularly impassable or dangerous in times of extreme bad weather?
8. Are there any Met Office warnings available?
9. Can the school premises be heated?
10. Is there provision of water for sanitary use or drinking?

Other considerations

1. Can enough Teaching Staff and Teaching Assistants attend school to ensure the adequate supervision of pupils?
2. Is the severe weather likely to clear quickly and allow safe access to the school building?

Procedures for notifying parents

In the event of an urgent and immediate closure

Schools should revert to their Emergency Planning procedures.

In the event of adverse weather

In the event that adverse weather forces a school to close mid-session and there is no immediate risk to children's safety parents should be made aware using the following means:

- Update OpenCheck with school status
- Update school website
- Text message / email to parents advising of the procedure for collecting their children
- Social Media message advising parents etc.

In the event of a predicted closure such as snow, parents should be notified as far in advance as reasonably practical using the following means:

- Update OpenCheck with school status
- Call TimeFM
- Update school website
- Text message / email to parents
- Social Media message advising parents etc.